

## **BURBANK CANYONS WILDERNESS STUDY AREA**

### **1. THE STUDY AREA - 13,395 acres**

The Burbank Canyons WSA (NV-030-525a) is located primarily in Douglas County, Nevada, five miles northwest of Wellington and 15 miles southeast of Gardnerville, Nevada. Approximately 1,065 acres along the eastern edge of the study area are located in Lyon County, Nevada. Boundaries of the study area coincide with roads and private property boundaries in Red Canyon on the north, along the foot of the Pine Nut Mountains on the east, in Rickey and Wedertz Canyons on the south, and along the ridge of Bald Mountain on the west.

### **2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE -**

**0 acres recommended for wilderness  
13,395 acres recommended for nonwilderness**

The recommendation for this WSA is to release all 13,395 acres for uses other than wilderness. Although the area would not be protected as wilderness, all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts would still be utilized. This includes land use planning decisions to close the area to off-road motor vehicles and to manage the area to protect scenic values. Discretionary actions which would significantly detract from the area's scenic quality would not be allowed. The recommendation to release the Burbank Canyons WSA from further wilderness consideration would allow for exploration and development of mineral resources around areas of historic mining interest, and still allow for management of recreation and scenic values for both non-vehicle and vehicle oriented recreation uses.

The Burbank Canyons WSA consists of three deep, scenic canyons with scattered riparian areas. Red Canyon, on the north side of the unit, contains a small perennial stream and trout fishery which is readily accessible by vehicle on the boundary road. The area has historically attracted both wilderness and non-wilderness types of recreation use. The recommendation to release this area from further wilderness consideration will allow more flexibility for the Bureau to manage these lands for both vehicle and non-vehicle recreation activities as well as other uses.

Although the development and extraction of mineral resources in the WSA would cause the loss of wilderness values, it is anticipated that this would occur mainly in the northwest portion of the area, around existing historic mining activity. The majority of the WSA is expected to remain in a natural condition.

### **3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS**

**A. Naturalness:** The Burbank Canyons WSA is predominantly natural with human imprints around all sides adjacent to the boundaries. The heart of the area, including Burbank Canyon, is entirely natural without any lasting human imprints. Sagebrush, pinyon pine, and juniper are abundant throughout the WSA. Riparian vegetation occupies about 300 acres of the WSA and is important wildlife habitat.

Burbank and Red Canyons contain small perennial streams. The appearance of naturalness in Red Canyon along the northern WSA boundary is affected by the presence of a boundary road and associated vehicular traffic near the stream. Along the eastern boundary, one patented 20-acre mining claim has several cabins and shows obvious evidence of mining activity. The parcel is cherry-stemmed, but still surrounded by the WSA. A 40-acre patented mining claim and adjacent disturbed ground along the southern border also are surrounded by the WSA. Along the western border of the WSA, mining disturbances associated with the Premier Mine and Longfellow Mine have impacted the apparent naturalness of the area. In all, about 3,000 acres are impacted visually by these intrusions.



**B. Solitude:** Opportunities for solitude vary within the WSA. Topographic screening by surrounding ridges creates an excellent opportunity for solitude in the center of the unit in Burbank Canyon itself. The opportunity to provide solitude for many people at one time is limited by the canyon's small size and narrow configuration. Vegetative screening is good on the canyon floors, however it is sparse on the hillsides.

**C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** Opportunities for wilderness recreation include hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, camping, hunting and sightseeing. The main opportunity for these activities is in the Burbank Canyon drainage in the middle of the WSA. The trip up to the head of Burbank Canyon and back can be accomplished in a day. Overnight camping is not necessary to experience the area's wilderness and scenic qualities. Elsewhere in the area away from Burbank Canyon, wilderness activities are influenced by the presence of roads, mining activity and attendant motor vehicle use. The high scenic quality in the area enhances the recreational experience.

**D. Special Features:** The area is highly scenic. The combination of steep and rugged ridges and canyon slopes above narrow riparian canyon bottoms presents a visually appealing landscape. Isolated areas of riparian vegetation add to the area's natural diversity and importance to wildlife.

#### **4. MANAGEABILITY**

There are no special circumstances which would make the Burbank Canyons WSA particularly difficult to manage as wilderness. Most of the terrain in the area is not suitable for driving off roads.

#### **5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES**

Approximately 1400 acres along the eastern side of the WSA are highly favorable for the occurrence of geothermal resources. The Bureau is not likely to allow geothermal development in the area however, because such development would conflict with scenic values and development could be accommodated outside the WSA.

There also is a high favorability for the occurrence of metallic minerals in the northwestern 2,200 acres of the WSA. About 1,300 acres west of Eagle Mountain have a low favorability for metallic minerals. The remainder of the area is moderately favorable for the occurrence of metallic minerals. The WSA contains several mines and prospects within or adjacent to the boundaries. Although most of the mineral deposits discovered so far in the Red Canyon mining district have been relatively small, many have been of high grade. Two gold claims have been patented. Six of the metals known to occur in or very near the WSA are classed as strategic and/or critical metals: silver, copper, lead, and tungsten (strategic metals); and zinc and antimony (strategic and critical metals).

#### **6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS**

A total of 37 comments specifically addressing this WSA were received during public review of the Draft Walker RMP/EIS. Nineteen commentors supported wilderness designation for all or part of the WSA. Eighteen commentors supported no wilderness for the WSA.

Those favoring wilderness commented on the favorable wilderness values in the area, the need for more wilderness in Nevada, particularly near urban areas such as Carson City and Reno, and the need to protect riparian habitat. One stated that scenic area designation would not provide strong enough protection. One comment stated that the area is definitely large enough to be managed as wilderness. Another commented that the mining in the area did not degrade the area. One comment wondered why the partial wilderness alternative was not selected, since it would pose few conflicts with mineral resource development. One observed that most of the area is inaccessible to off-road vehicles.

Those opposing designation were concerned that wilderness would preclude development of an extremely attractive mineral resource, that too much wilderness has already been withdrawn from mineral entry, and that the roads, inholdings, and mining activity make the area unsuitable for wilderness.

The Department of Air Force and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service expressed support for wilderness designation in order to limit human habitation and to protect riparian and fishery habitat from the impacts of mining. The State of Nevada through the Governor's Consistency Review process opposed wilderness designation because of private inholdings and extensive mining activity. The other agencies did not identify any specific jurisdictional conflicts with any of the alternatives. The Environmental Protection Agency commented that the rationale for recommending no wilderness needed clarification.